

The Bible ❖

Mode of

❖ Baptism

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THE
BIBLE MODE OF BAPTISM



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The following essay was prepared at the request of an association of Congregational ministers. The author was himself associated with Baptists in early life and passed through a severe mental struggle in determining the proper method of confessing his faith in Christ. The results of his studies, begun in student life, are embodied in the present treatise. That he is a candid seeker for truth is obvious in every sentence. It is also obvious that he has been careful, patient, and reverent in his study of the Scriptures. His exposition of Christ's baptism manifests a deep sympathy with divine revelation, and has seemed to some minds, at least, a convincing argument. The essay has elicited general interest and commendation wherever it has been read, and has proved helpful to some who were in perplexity. It is worthy of careful perusal by all who are interested in our Christian ordinances.

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Professor of Didactic Theology in Chicago Theological Seminary.

CHICAGO, May 25, 1891.

We concur in the above :—

JAMES TOMPKINS, *Secretary of the Illinois Home Missionary Society.*

CHARLES R. BLISS, *Secretary of the New West Education Commission.*

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THE BIBLE MODE OF BAPTISM.¹

BY JONATHAN BLANCHARD.

FEW Christians expect the kingdom of God to come by the increase of the Christian sects under their present names and forms. They look for changes in answer to Christ's prayer "that they may all be one" (John 17: 21). And if Baptists and other Christians could be brought to see the Bible mode of baptism alike, and so commune together in Christ's body and blood, it would be a great step toward answering the Saviour's prayer.

This paper is written in the humble hope of contributing to that end. The question is: *Did the New Testament churches practice immersion?* Their practice is our law, for

¹ Read by appointment of Elgin Congregational Association, Illinois, April 14, 1891.

they were led by guides inspired and sent by Christ.

Now we know from the church histories, and concerning it there is no dispute, that about the middle of the third century after Christ, baptisteries were built and immersion was common. *But were the baptisms recorded in the New Testament immersions?* This question settled, will settle the mode for us, for the apostles were "endued with power from on high" (Luke 24: 49); but pastors in the following centuries were not inspired men. They did not work miracles; nor were their writings part of the Bible. In discussing this fundamental question, let us carefully consider the following propositions:—

PROPOSITION I. *God accepts men in both modes of baptism.*

PROOF. We see it and know it. Few rational Christians dispute it. None pretend that either Baptists or Pedobaptists are the only children of God there are, and if both are his children both are accepted. The first baptisms I ever saw were immersions in Saxton's River, Vermont. The persons im-

mersed were my friends, some of them my own sisters. They came up out of the river with locks streaming with water, and faces beaming with the Holy Ghost. If those persons were not Christians, there are none. They lived *to* Christ, and many of them have died *in* Christ. We "knew" them (not guessed at them) by the Saviour's test, "their fruits." "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7: 20). And I have not the slightest doubt they are now with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Enoch, and Elijah, who, the Bible teaches, are now in heaven. God met them and filled them with the Holy Ghost in that stream. "If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that [knowledge] a man hath, and not according to that he hath not" (2 Cor. 8: 12). Those people in their baptism acted up to the knowledge and belief which they had, and it were madness and fatuity to doubt that their baptism was accepted of God.

And non-immersed Christians are accepted of God. I was "baptized with water" applied to my forehead sixty-two years ago;

and I know and believe that in that baptism I was filled with the Holy Spirit, who has been with me ever since. And in a ministry of nearly sixty years I have been comforted, helped, and strengthened by both immersed and non-immersed Christians. And all who are capable of knowing know that God accepts Christians in both kinds of baptism; blesses, sanctifies, and saves them.

PROPOSITION II. *If there is any immersion in the New Testament, John immersed Christ.*

There is no stronger case for immersion in the New Testament than the baptism of Christ by John. "Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbade him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him. Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water" (Matt. 3: 13-16). The baptism of the eunuch by Philip is, perhaps, equally strong.

“And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? . . . And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip” (Acts 8: 36, 38, 39). Both parties went down into the water, and came up out of the water: and the baptizing was done while they were in the water, before they came out.

These two instances of baptism, with the words, “buried with him by baptism” (Rom. 6: 4), and the idea of “following our Lord into his watery grave” (Col. 2: 12), have made more immersionists than all the Bible besides; while the baptizing of the jailer and “all his,” at midnight, at Philippi;¹ the baptism of Cornelius and his family and friends,² and the reception of three and five

¹ “And was baptized, he and all his, straightway.”—Acts 16: 33.

² “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.”—Acts 10: 47, 48.

thousand converts at once (Acts 2: 41; 4: 4) would seem to imply baptism by shorter methods.

But neither mode is positively proved by these passages. It is not said the person was put all over under water; or that water was applied to his forehead. Neither does the Greek word *baptizo* settle it: for in Mark 7: 4 ("And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not") *baptizo* is properly translated "wash."¹ I say properly, for if every time a Jew, his wife, or child came into the house from the market place, they had to be immersed before eating breakfast, dinner, or supper, a large family might require forty or fifty immersions a day. And it would have kept one half the population hauling water from the pools to immerse the other half decently. But all Bap-

¹The author calls attention to the fact, that the preferred verb here of Westcott and Hart is *rantizo*, meaning *to sprinkle*, and that in the margin the Revised Version recognizes this as an alternative reading, thus: "Some ancient authorities read *sprinkle themselves*." The fact is thus made clear that the two verbs, *baptizo* and *rantizo* were used interchangeably by those who knew the usages of Christ's day and of apostolic times. *Baptizo*, therefore, did not always mean *immerse*.

tists and non-Baptists see, and all say that if there were any immersions in the Bible, John immersed Christ. There is no stronger case for immersion than this. But now we say:—

PROPOSITION III. *John did not immerse Christ.* And if he did not, there is no immersion in the New Testament; for no case is stronger for immersion than this. Then let us scan the proof, for the whole question turns on Christ's baptism. Let us go back and stand by the river and look at the parties, when Jesus came "from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him" (Matt. 3: 13):—

John was a good priest's son, six months older than Jesus, who was and is our High Priest forever; of whom all other true priests were only types and shadows, ending in him. So now there are no priests but Christ to negotiate salvation for man. He "hath an unchangeable priesthood" (Heb. 7: 24). True, we are kings and priests, but only as we are "in him" and "one with him." He is now the only priest.

John was baptizing the people "unto

repentance" to prepare the way for Christ; when lo, Jesus came also, and requested baptism! John, knowing he had no sin, and needed no repentance, forbade him. Jesus gave him a reason which satisfied John at once; and he baptized him. Now what was that reason that satisfied John? What did Jesus come to be baptized for, and for what was he baptized? If we can find exactly what he was baptized for, perhaps we can learn something of how he was baptized; at least, whether John immersed him,

Certainly he was not baptized for repentance, for he had no sin to repent of. What then was he baptized for? Jesus himself answered this question. He told John he wished to be baptized, "*to fulfil all righteousness*" (Matt. 3: 15). But what righteousness? Not to be made more righteous himself, for he was as holy as he could be. He was "the Sun of Righteousness." Not for an example to us sinners, for he had no sin. He was baptized to fulfill the Ritual Law, which he said he came to fulfill. "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the

prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Matt. 5: 17). It was a rite they were talking about, namely, baptism by water. He was baptized to fulfill *that* rite as it stood in *that* law. He came to fulfill that law, and John understood him, and he did fulfill it. He was born a Jew; circumcised as a Jew; kept Sabbath as a Jew; he was sacrificed as a Jew, and the Jewish sacrifices ended in him. In the kingdom of God he was the last of the Jews. There is in him "neither Greek nor Jew" (Col. 3: 11). His body was the "bread of God," and his blood made atonement "once for all" for sin; so that "by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10: 14). Jews do not sacrifice animals since Christ fulfilled and ended the ceremonial law. Now what rite in that law did he fulfill by his baptism? If we can find that, perhaps we can find whether John immersed him or not.

We know that the "righteousness" or rite which he was baptized to fulfill is in the Old Testament. The New Testament was not written yet. When Jesus and John stood at

the Jordan the Old Testament was all the Bible there was ; and Christ sanctioned that as "the Scriptures." The Moral Law, that is, love to God and our neighbor, is written in men's hearts as well as in the Book. But rites and ceremonies are written in the Book alone.

Now what Old Testament rite was Jesus baptized to fulfill?

There is but one answer to this question in all the Old Testament, *and that was not immersion!* It was the washing of young priests before they went to preaching. "*Aaron and his sons thou shalt bring unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and shalt wash them with water*" (Ex. 29: 4; compare also Ex. 40: 12). This was to license them to preach. They were Levites before, but now they were to expound the law to the people. This washing was to hallow them to minister in the priest's office (Ex. 29: 1). Christ was about to preach, and did preach almost immediately after his baptism. All the godly people for fifteen hundred years had seen their ministers washed that way.

It would in their eyes have been unbecoming for a private person to preach without that washing. Therefore it was that Jesus said, "*Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness*" (Matt. 3: 15). John's father had been washed that way to fulfill that very same rite, and John understood it at a flash. "*Then he suffered him.*"

This was the very rite or "righteousness" which John baptized Jesus to fulfill: *and that was not immersion!*

But how do we know that that washing of young priests was not immersion?

Answer. Because there was nothing at the tabernacle big enough to immerse a man in: nothing but the laver, between the altar and the tabernacle door, to wash the priest's hands and feet. "For Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet thereat:" (Ex. 30: 19). The laver was of brass, and stood upon its foot, like a washbowl on a small table. If there had been a baptistery there, it would have been described. All the tools of the tabernacle were described even to the tongs and snuffers. There was no baptistery

there. Therefore, that washing to license Christ to preach was *not necessary*.

But why was not Christ washed at the door of the temple as the priests were?

Answer. Because he was a peasant from Galilee, and had not yet healed the multitudes and fed them, and would not have been allowed there, and no priest would have washed him. Besides, he was founding the kingdom of heaven, or Christian dispensation, and John was his forerunner and he went to be baptized of him where John was at work.

But why does not the Bible tell us exactly how that washing was performed?

Answer. Probably because the thing was important but the *mode* was not, if only the baptism was with water. When Moses was ordered to wash the Levites, he "sprinkled water of purifying upon them" (Num. 8: 7). Peter was a strict Jew, and he asked Christ to wash his hands and his head (John 13: 9). But the point is that Jesus was washed by John when he was to "begin to preach" (Matt. 4: 17); to fulfill Ex. 20: 4; and that washing was *not necessary*. Therefore,

John did not immerse Christ. But there is no case for immersion in the New Testament stronger than this. Therefore, *New Testament baptism was not immersion*, unless the word baptize used in the New Testament always means immerse. But —

PROPOSITION IV. *The word baptize in the New Testament does not mean immerse : but to purify with water.*

The proof of this is clear and absolute. In John 3 : 25, 26, we read : “ There arose a question between some of John’s disciples and the Jews about purifying. And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.” The dispute was about purifying and they brought the question to John, and behold it was about baptizing : namely, What right had Jesus to baptize ? A mere inspection of those two verses shows that the purifying in one verse was baptizing in the other ; that is, in the mouth of the Jews the word baptize meant “ purify.” And if so, and if we knew

their manner of purifying, we should know their manner of baptizing; that is, exactly how they baptized.

In the preceding chapter (John 2: 6), we are told what their manner of purifying was. At the wedding at Cana, "There were set there six waterpots of stone, *after the manner of the purifying of the Jews*, containing two or three firkins apiece." That is, each house had a stone waterpot at which they purified every time they came in from the market place (Mark 7: 4). The word in that verse (Mark 7: 4) is *baptizontai*; the one regular word for baptism in the third person plural number, but translated "wash" in our Bibles. But to purify the crowd at that wedding they got together six of those stone waterpots, just as we see many washbowls for passengers at a depot. They applied this water to the feet, hands, and head. This the Jews did every time they came in from the market place, lest haply they had touched something unclean. And this was the Jews' "manner of purifying"; and it was their manner of baptizing. For we have seen in

John 3: 25, 26, that purifying meant baptizing, and baptizing purifying. No candid and competent person can look at those two verses and not see it. I have asked hundreds of persons to scrutinize those two verses, and I have never met one who did not say that purifying in one meant baptizing in the other, and *vice versa*; so that those two words in the New Testament are synonyms or convertible terms, both meaning *a religious purifying with water*: and “the manner of purifying” was with stone waterpots; and it was also their manner of baptizing, for the two words meant and mean the same thing, as used in the New Testament, and therefore the manner of baptizing *was not immersion*. One of those stone waterpots did not hold water enough to immerse a man, nor were they of the proper shape. Modern butter and lard firkins hold from seven to nine gallons, but the Hebrew firkins, say our old Bibles, held seven pints,—four and nine-tenths solid inches. A waterpot holding “two or three” such firkins would not immerse a man to his knee. Baptizing

was purifying, and the “manner of purifying” of the Jews was with those stone waterpots. John’s ancestors had been purified or baptized in that way, to license them to preach, for fifteen hundred years, and that was Christ’s baptism. *And it was not immersion*; but he was purified as the Jews were, and they were purified at those stone waterpots. Immersion seems not to have been thought of at that time. There is no case of immersion to be found in the whole Bible up to that time. The proof, thus, that Christ was not immersed, seems absolutely perfect. Certainly the rite, or “righteousness” he was baptized to fulfill, and which John understood and to which he consented, was not immersion; and if John had changed the form of laver-washing and purifying at those little stone waterpots, to which the Jews had been accustomed fifteen hundred years, to immersion, he would have raised a storm of objections. Therefore, Christ was not immersed.

“But,” one objects, “Christ was a priest, to offer sacrifice, not a preacher; why do

you say he was baptized to license him to preach?"

Answer. True he was a priest, and he ended bloody sacrifices by his own sacrifice on the cross. But priesthood was a mighty preaching force as well. Malachi (2 : 7) says, "The priest's lips should keep knowledge, and *they should seek the law at his mouth.*" This preaching duty of priesthood Christ continued and enlarged, and called twelve and then seventy of his disciples to his aid, saying, "As ye go, preach" (Matt. 10 : 7). And his baptism was his public recognition or license as he "began to preach" (Matt. 4 : 17).

The inference is : Jesus and John stood by a fording-place at Jordan ; dishes were scarce, and the climate warm : they stepped into the water, and John baptized Jesus as priests had been washed at the laver for fifteen hundred years, and as the people were baptized later at their stone waterpots ; and though that was not, *could* not be immersion — yet as immersion is "purifying with water," it satisfies the demand ; and the command includes

both forms, and God accepts and blesses both. And since John did not immerse Christ, there was no immersion in the New Testament. No case is stronger for immersion than this. And New Testament example is our law. Immersion came in afterward, when ceremonies began to be exalted.

Christianity is a religion for our globe, and in climes where men have no water in winter, but from ice melted over a fish-oil lamp, immersion would be difficult. But in mild climates and in mountain streams, immersion is a popular, pleasing, and impressive ordinance. And as the first Christians, for a time, kept both Saturday and Sunday as Sabbath, and Christ met with and blessed both, so he blesses both modes of baptism; for his command includes both. *Both are purifying with water.* No other denomination has excelled Baptists in fearless fidelity to the Bible and reforms. Bernard, Stearns, Pease, Colver, and others bared their bosoms to the vilification and vengeance of the secret altars in 1826-32. And Gordon, Gifford, and Grant, in Boston, with hosts of Baptists, north and

south, are rallying for Christ against the same altars of Baal.

Across the ocean, Mr. Spurgeon and the English Baptists, though sincere immersionists, do not excommunicate their equally honest brethren who are not. And if on this side the ocean the regenerated people shall melt their communion tables into one, angels and men will rejoice, and the redemption of the world draw nigh.

At Green Plains, Ohio, when Abolitionists were excluded from churches, I have slept in a Quaker's barn loft along with Quakers, Baptists, Episcopalians, Congregationalists, Methodists, and Presbyterians. In that crowd were Salmon P. Chase, afterward governor of Ohio, senator, Secretary of the Treasury, and Chief Justice of the United States, and Senator Tom Morris, with other distinguished Americans. When we were laid down, seventy-five of us, in a long row, on carpets spread on hay, I found a Quaker preacher on one side of me and a Baptist preacher on the other. The love of God and our neighbor had fused us into one !

The movement represented by that crowd in that barn loft eventuated in the election of Lincoln and the freedom of four million slaves. It was the Bible that did it, and the movement is but just begun. And if the sects that believe in and insist on regeneration by the Holy Ghost come to believe and obey the Bible alike, though with some diversity of tastes and ideas, like the first Christians, they will be "of one heart" (Acts 4: 32).

It is a mistake to think that the phrase "*buried with him by baptism into his death*" (Rom. 6: 4) settles the mode of baptism. None take the words literally, for none are baptized into death—held there till they die. The apostle refers not to the form of baptism, but the spiritual fact.

A Hebrew servant who had been a Gentile, and who did not wish to go back to heathenism, went before the judge and had his ear bored with an awl, and he became a Hebrew "forever." By that ceremony of ear-boring he became dead and buried to his former state of heathenism and arose to a new life, that

of a servant of the true God. That is all that is meant by "buried with Christ by baptism." If the transaction is real, and the person is regenerated by the Holy Ghost, he passes indeed into "newness of life"; but not all immersed or non-immersed persons do so.

The first Baptists of New England were children of the Pilgrims, who studied civil liberty by the light of the fires which burned their fathers. The children of those fathers never should have separated. We are approaching the time when "*the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one*" (Zech. 14: 9). All the elements of evil are astir. Let us return to "the camp of the saints of the Most High." And then, when the hosts of Gog and Magog shall compass that camp about, whoever lives to see that time will see "fire come down from God out of heaven, and devour them" (Rev. 20: 9).

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